

RANCHO BODEGA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

World War II Days: Jenner Radar Site B-76

by Elinor G. Twohy - 2011

During World War II, the coastal system of radar stations was part of a serious effort to fend off any incursions by the Japanese. Protection of the coast – of the country – was of paramount importance. An attack by the Japanese was considered a real threat.

The Jenner radar site was located on the south side of the river, directly opposite the town of Jenner, that was on the north side. (Penny Island is in the middle of the river, directly below the radar station).

The folk-tale, the byword, about this radar station was that it was camouflaged to look like a little village with white picket fences and wooden flowers painted in bright colors. This pleasing bit of subterfuge was not actually the case.

JENNER RADAR SITE B-76

SONOMA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

Lieutenant Lloyd D. Winslow was stationed in Jenner in 1942 and again in 1943 and 1944, after which he married a local girl. He lived in Monte Rio within 10 miles of Jenner, and was able to give details of the operation.

He reported to Lt. Dutcher, who in turn reported to Lt. Water, the man in charge of the station in 1942.

Winslow set up and installed the radar system in Jenner, and also those radar systems up the coast at Plantation and in Ferndale. To the south there were radar stations on Mt. Tamalpais and Half Moon Bay. These intervals allowed the whole coast to be covered by the antennas.

Also, tracking was done by airplanes in the area. Long distance warnings covered 150 miles. All planes had to notify the Jenner station if they were going to be in the area.

There were 125 men stationed in Jenner, working 24 hours a day; a shift was always on duty. The men were in the following four branches of service: infantry, signal corps, air force, artillery (Capt. Gee in charge). Also, the Coast Guard reported in.

It was the Infantry that protected the Jenner Radar Station. Infantrymen walked Blind Beach and Goat Rock Beach to the mouth of the Russian River all night long with the trained dogs. (Dog trainers were not infantrymen; they were specialists who were brought in).

Machine guns were located in two places: a 50 caliber gun was on top of the hill right above the camp on Brown's Hill (named after farmer Elmer Brown), and a 30 caliber machine gun was at the pullout overlooking Goat Rock.

There was one incident when the artillery fired on what was thought to be a Japanese submarine. Capt. Gee was in charge of that operation.

WORLD WAR TWO DAYS

The station had its own water system; the source of water was springs. No lights were allowed at night. There was a guard station at the entrance to Goat Rock Road from Highway 1 (the same location as the current state park entrance). The mess hall was the first building on the left on the road leading into the encampment.

There was not a great deal for the servicemen to do in Jenner, except to go to the bar. They had hidden a small boat near Penny Island so that they could go, without proper passes, to Jenner. On one occasion Lt. Winslow removed the boat – and the men had to walk all the way to the Guard Station (several miles) and suffer the consequences.

Winslow married Lois Rathford, a Monte Rio girl, and was subsequently re-stationed at Jenner ('43 and '44), living in the town in a house (probably on Castle Crag) located above the school house in Willig Avenue. The captains lived in Jenner itself and some of the enlisted men at Bridgehaven.

Winslow retired as a Major – at that time in the Philippines, where he had been in charge of a radar strip – and subsequently returned to Monte Rio, where for 12 years he owned and ran “The Pink Elephant,” the bar that until recently was still the center of activity in Monte Rio.

Sources: Site Survey Summary Sheet for DERP-FUDS SITE NO. JO09CA091000 US Army Corps of Engineers Archives Search Report Findings for the former Jenner Radar Site B-76. Lloyd Davis Winslow died as this article was being written, on February 23, 2011, at the age of 93.

